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OUR Teacher HELPS a sea LION

When Our Teacher was your age, he walked each morning on the ocean beach with his dog MD. While the beagle sniffed starfish, sand dollars, ropes of kelp, and crab shells, Our Teacher strolled along the sand, wondering about his life. He especially wondered about his future, about what he wanted to do when he got older.

One day at the beach, Our Teacher heard some barking. Was it MD? No, his dog was busy sniffing a lost flip-flop. Instead, the barking came from a sea lion, lying on the damp sand at the water's edge. A nylon fishing net was wrapped around its body and flippers.

Here is the sea lion Our Teacher saw:



Long ears flapping, tail wagging, MD ran up to the whiskered sea creature. He sniffed it end to end.

Our Teacher pulled a pocketknife from his pocket. He said to the sea lion, "Keep calm. I'll soon have you free."

He cut the tangle of netting from the sea lion's back. He cut it off its front flippers and slippery sides. Finally, he yanked the entire net away.

"Now go back to the sea," he said. "Enjoy your life. And stay away from fishing boats."

The sea lion waved its flippers. He turned toward Our Teacher and said, "Lucky for me you were on this beach today. If you hadn't cut me loose, I would have drowned when the tide came in."

"No problem," said Our Teacher. "I'm glad I was able to help."

"For saving my life, I wish to grant you a favor," said the sea lion.

"A favor?" Our Teacher said. "No favor is necessary."

"I can bring you anything you want from the ocean," said the sea lion. "I can bring you anything you want from the shore."

"But I have everything I want," Our Teacher said. "I have MD, and we live in a good house with my mom. I go to a good school, and I have lots of friends."

"What do you like to do?" the sea lion asked.

"Many things. I like making sand castles with moats and building driftwood forts. I like searching for agates and wishing stones. I like identifying shorebirds and seashells."

"You enjoy many interesting things," said the sea lion. "That makes you an interesting person. I often see you walking on this beach. You appear to be thinking deep thoughts."

"I think about my mom a lot, and I think about my friends. I also wonder about the years to come, about what I'm supposed to do when I grow up."

"Then I know what favor I can grant you," said the sea lion. "I can help you find the Thinking Cap."

Our Teacher made a face. "The Thinking Cap? You mean what my teacher tells me

to put on when she wants me to think harder. She says, 'Put on your Thinking Cap,' even though wearing hats in the classroom isn't allowed."

"The Thinking Cap is real," said the sea lion. "I've seen it work its magic."

"What does it do?" Our Teacher asked. "Will it help me think better?"

"It does much more than that."

"Can it tell the future?"

"Something even more important," said the sea lion. "The Thinking Cap helps you discover your natural gifts and hidden talents. It helps you find your purpose, your true calling in life."

"But I don't have any hidden skills or unknown talents or anything like that."

The sea lion remained silent while Our Teacher thought a moment. At length, the boy asked, "So, where is this magical hat, this Thinking Cap?"

"You can find it in Finland, far north in Lapland," the sea lion said.

"Finland?" said Our Teacher. "That's in northern Europe, and Lapland is above the Arctic Circle. I could never go to Lapland even if I wanted to."

"Ruff! Ruff!" went MD.

On the horizon, a big buttery sun was slipping into the sea.

"I must go home now and do my chores," Our Teacher said.

The sea lion waddled into the water. But before its head dunked out of sight, it called out, "If you want to find the Thinking Cap, return to this beach tomorrow morning."

No one knew if Our Teacher had heard the sea lion or not. He and MD were already running across the beach toward home.